

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Finding of No Significant Impact
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-UT-W020-2010-014-EA**

February 2011

Sevier Lake Competitive Potash Leasing Proposal

***Location:* Millard County, Utah**

***Applicant/Address:* Bureau of Land Management, Utah State Office**

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Fillmore Field Office
95 East 500 North
Fillmore, UT 84631
Phone: 435.743.3100
FAX: 435.743.3135

Utah State Office
440 West 200 South, Suite 500
Salt Lake City, UT 84101
Phone: 801.539.4001
FAX: 801.539.4013



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INTRODUCTION:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis (DOI-BLM-UT-W020-2010-014-EA) for a proposed action to address Potash Leasing on the Sevier Lake in Millard County, Utah. The project would include placing 125,762 acres in the vicinity of the Sevier Dry Lake up for lease sale and utilizing the lake bed and surrounding area for the production of brines and mineral resources. The BLM developed two different production scenarios in order to evaluate the potential impacts of mining and processing potash. The need for the proposal is to (1) provide the public an opportunity to competitively lease the potash resources in the Sevier Lake Playa and (2) allow the initial step toward recovery of the potash resources from federal lands. This would be met while accomplishing the following objectives:

1. Minimizing or avoiding impacts by utilizing mitigation measures that would protect non-mineral resources.
2. Ensuring that proper monitoring is established to document that resources are not being damaged.

The Sevier Lake project area contains a large “Dry” lake bed. Extensive exploration on the lake bed (playa) has shown that there are potassium laden saline brine resources under the surface of the lake playa. Through monitoring of weather data and past production it has been shown that this area is a viable location to evaporate brine to produce salts. The Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 allows the Secretary of the Interior to lease potassium mineral resources. Potash is a name for various potassium salts that are water soluble. These are mainly used for fertilizer production. EA#DOI-BLM-UT-W020-2010-014-EA is attached and is incorporated by reference for this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). A no action alternative and two action alternatives were analyzed in the EA.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects described in the Warm Springs RMP/FEIS. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed.

This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described:

Context: The Sevier Lake leasing proposal project is an action directly involving approximately 125,762 acres of BLM administered land that by itself does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance. The Sevier Lake is a large terminal discharge playa, where waters entering the basin from surrounding groundwater

aquifers and the Sevier River evaporate into the atmosphere. The Sevier Lake is within the Basin and Range Physiographic Province, which is noted for numerous north-south oriented mountain ranges, separated by broad, flat valley floors. Cultural resources, water resources, and wildlife were identified for analysis of cumulative impacts in the EA.

Intensity: The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 and incorporated into resources and issues considered (includes supplemental authorities Appendix 1 H-1790-1) and supplemental Instruction Memorandum, Acts, regulations and Executive Orders.

The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.** The proposed action could have potential impact to resources as described in the EA. Mitigating measures to reduce impacts were incorporated in the design of the action alternatives. None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA are considered significant, nor do the effects exceed those described in the Warm Springs FEIS.
2. **The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.** The proposed action is to offer land in the vicinity of the Sevier Dry Lake for competitive potash leasing. The EA outlines mitigation stipulations which would become part of the lease document if the decision is to offer the lease tracts for public sale. These stipulations are established to mitigate impacts to public health and safety and the human environment; they would be included in all approvals associated with this proposal should they be processed in the future.
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** The historic and cultural resources of the area have been described and potential impacts mitigated in Alternative A: Proposed Action: Sevier Lake Large Leasing Area Alternative. The following components of the Human Environment and Resource Issues are not affected because they are not present in the project area: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Environmental Justice, Fish Habitat, Fuels/Fire Management, Paleontology, Wilderness, Wild Horses and Burros, and Areas with Wilderness Characteristics. In addition, the following components of the Human Environment and Resource Issues, although present, would not be affected by this proposed action for the reasons listed in Appendix A of the EA: Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Farmland (Prime or Unique), Geology/Mineral Resources/ Energy Production, Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds, Lands/Access, Native American Religious Concerns, Rangeland Health Standards, Recreation, Soils, Threatened, Endangered, Candidate or Special Status Plant Species, Wastes (hazardous or solid), Woodland/Forestry, Vegetation. Eleven components of the Human Environment and Resource Issues were analyzed in detail in Chapter 4. None of these would be significantly impacted because adaptive management strategies, based upon the results of data gathering efforts under the Chapter 2 lease stipulations, would be utilized to minimize residual resource impacts.

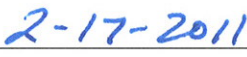
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** There is no scientific controversy over the nature of the impacts.
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The project is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas. For example, the EA describes a similar operation located near the Bonneville Salt Flat in Western Utah (EA p B-15). There is also an operation on lands under the jurisdiction of the State of Utah on the Great Salt Lake in Northern Utah which the BLM is aware of. The BLM has reviewed the effects on the environment at Sevier Lake for similar operations at least two other times in the past as stated in the EA (EA p. C-2 through C-3). The environmental effects to the human environment are fully analyzed in the EA. There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The actions considered in the EA were considered by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted. A complete analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the selected alternative and all other alternatives is described in Chapter 4 of the EA.
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts – which include connected actions regardless of land ownership.** The interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible actions in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted. A complete disclosure of the effects of the project is contained in Chapter 4 of the EA.
8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The project would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. A Class I cultural inventory has been completed for the proposed action. Consultation with SHPO has been completed in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA and they have concurred with a “no adverse effect” on historic properties.
9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, or the degree to which the action may adversely affect: 1) a proposed to be listed endangered or threatened species or its habitat, or 2) a species on BLM’s sensitive species list.** Mitigating measures to reduce impacts to wildlife have been incorporated into the design of the proposal. There are no listed species which occupy habitat within the project boundary, it has been determined that they would not be affected because in a review of these species home ranges it was determined that there

are no species which home ranges occur within or reasonably close to the analysis area. No other threatened or endangered plants or animals are known to occur in the area. It was concluded that there was "no effect" for threatened, endangered, or sensitive species.

- 10. Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, local, or tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, where non-federal requirements are consistent with federal requirements.** The project does not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. State, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process. Furthermore, letters were sent to five Native American tribes concerning Native American Religious Concerns. Follow up phone calls were initiated with the tribes, and it was concluded and documented that no concerns were identified in this project. In addition, the project is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.



Authorized Officer



Date